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ABSTRACT

The role of the elementary school principal is critical in determining school effectiveness. This study analyzes the thinking and language of 22 "effective change" elementary school principals to discover common patterns in decisionmaking processes. The method of grounded theory delineates implicit theories principals use to make strategic decisions. Data were collected over a 3-year period from interviews and observations. Schools were selected that featured a self-directive improvement program with minimal resources and with principals who had participated for more than 4 years. From interviews, the principals' language was transformed to theoretical categories through comparison analysis and content analysis. Investigation revealed a common knowledge base used to create improvement. First, principals believe that they develop an organizational capacity for change. Second, the effective principal is skilled at "sensemaking"--creating an interactive fabric of thought with others, thereby accomplishing objectives. And third, effective principals use four frames in strategic dialogs: (1) a "criterion of effectiveness" to achieve improvement; (2) the relationship between principal-teachers-parents-students; (3) setting professional and school standards; and (4) establishing an equitable discipline code. To understand how schools become effective, researchers should study the collaborative activity that emerges from the knowledge of these effective change practitioners. Thirty references are appended. (CJH)

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HOW AND WHY SUCCESSFUL ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS ADDRESS STRATEGIC ISSUES

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INTRODUCTION

The variety of responses a school can make to demands made on it by its constituents is severely limited by local policy, state school codes, and Federal mandates. Yet within these limitations, some schools seem to thrive and others to deteriorate. Major research resources have been directed toward the identification of "effective schools." Brookover and Lezotte, Edmonds and others have identified certain attributes common to effective schools, the most pervasive of which is "strong leadership by the principal."

Over the past decade the literature on "effective schools" has grown steadily. In spite of the disagreement over the usefulness and methodology of this research, its advocates and critics agree that "in the search for factors that influence school effectiveness, the role of the elementary school principal has emerged as critical." [1]

Over the past three years, researchers in the field of educational administration and policy studies have continued to refine the descriptions of the various roles of the principal. In the Fall of 1982, the Review of Educational Research published a comprehensive review of the literature which addressed questions about "typical principal behaviors, effective principal behaviors, and obstacles to growth in principal effectiveness," all within the context of a framework of planned educational change. [2]

Planned change, a strategy of organization development (OD), has also received its due attention from researchers in recent years: Zaltman, Florio and Sikorski's Dynamic Educational Change [3] was published in 1977,

and a review of "Organization Development in Schools: The State of the Art" published in 1981 called for an analysis of the status of organization development as the concept is applied in schools. [4] Both of these sources examined the complexities of OD, and OD's application to school settings and policy-making bodies, within the context of school improvement.

In addition to research into the role of the elementary school principal and organization development in schools, a third body of research, policy analysis and implementation, is emerging from the discipline of Political Science, expecially in the arena of public administration and policy studies. Since the mid-seventies researchers in this area have emphasized paradigms which trace outcomes of policy implementation, rather than paradigms of dissemination of research, or who adopts what and why. Books and studies, such as Lipsky's Street Level Bureaucracy [5] have influenced the field of policy analysis to the point of redefining its analytical perspectives. These newer research products probe the processes of implementation of policy, the interactions between program development and day-to-day routine within the bureaucracies, cultural considerations of the agency implementing the policies, and appropriation levels and other constraints well-known to street level bureaucrats.

Very recently many of these threads have been brought together by researchers who have studied the instructionally effective school, and have attempted to flesh out its components. [6,7] Other researchers have begun to probe the attributes and competencies of "effective principals." [8,9] Still others have become interested in the effective principal's interaction

with school processes, and his or her influence upon these processes.[10,11] DeBevoise has synthesized the research on the principal as instructional leader, some of which connects principal styles and personalities with specific school cultural contexts relative to either desirable or undesirable outcomes.[12] De Bevoise quotes Dwyer, Lee, Rowan, and Bossert:[13]

> We speculate that the effects of these routine acts (the principal's daily duties) on the quality of instruction and student experiences in schools can be substantial. As such, this developing perspective on instructional leadership provides the overworked, out-of-time practitioner with a manageable alternative form...These are the common acts of the principalship. They require no new program, no innovation, no extensive change. The success of these activities for instructional management hinges instead, on the principal's capacity to connect them to the instructional system.

To our knowledge the "principal's capacity to connect" instructional management issues to the instructional system has not been investigated explicitly. Very little research delineates those school factors the effective principal considers important for the process of decision-making during the implementation of school improvement programs; these important factors are only named. We do not know how effective principals tend to react to performance deficiencies, nor do we know what phenomena and knowledge bases inform their implicit theories of action.

Until recently it has been difficult to relate school factors to the principal's strategies. The many different configurations of effective schools, each owning different operations and implementation procedures, depending upon the principal's management style and upon school district structures (mainly the degree of centrality involved),[14] have confounded research attempting to discover these relationships.

> There is considerably more data in the literature about strategies used by principals than there is about either goals or factors. The bulk of studies available emphasizes this set of principal behaviors and the factors they are intended to influence or actually do influence. While it seems crucial (both conceptually and practically), the present state of research evidence does not permit the establishment of relationships between factors and strategies. A major complication in the establishment of such links is that single strategies may influence multiple factors.[15]

With the knowledge gleaned from all the research cited above, the time seemed ripe to attempt to identify possible links between single strategies used by principals and the multiple factors those strategies influence. By using a research strategy proposed by Glaser and Strauss,[16] that of generating grounded theory, we sought to analyze the thinking and language of principals in a variety of schools and school districts to see if there is any pattern in the way they structure their decision-making on a daily basis, how they decide when school change (improvement) is needed, and how they go about structuring and implementing their strategies to accomplish school improvement goals.

The Research Questions

How do effective principals go about structuring their strategies for school improvement? If a "steady state" is necessary for successful adaptation in organizations what is it that the effective change principal does to promote this steady state, even as he or she goes about running the school on a day-to-day basis? What are the frames the principal uses, and the important factors he or she addresses in strategic decision-making processes during school improvement programs?

How does the principal link his own actions with the academic and behavioral outcomes of the classroom? Do the linkages the principal makes in strategy for school improvement describe a knowledge common to effective principals? If there is a common "knowledge-in-action" here, of what does it consist?

Methodology: The Rationale:
The Generation of a Grounded Theory

Generation of a grounded theory provides a systematic way to delineate and compare the implicit theories effective principals use to make strategic decisions. Data collected over three years came from interviews, observations of classrooms, shadowing of principals in their schools over the course of a school day, conversations with parents, school secretaries, teachers, district office staff, superintendents, Educational and Organizational Behavior researchers, archival data, and research papers and journals. All interviews with principals during the three-year period were taped, and it is these data, the language of the principals, which form the indicators, the primary data base.

The twenty-two principals in the research sample were interviewed and observed during the school day. The principal's language was transformed from indicators to theoretical categories and properties through constant comparison analysis [17] and content analysis.[18] The principals interviewed were from four different suburban elementary districts and one large urban district. School improvement efforts in the suburban and urban districts had been underway for at least three years.

The choice of a research sample was straightforward in the preliminary stage of research. Model schools from three "lighthouse districts" were chosen in order for the investigator to become familiar with the configurations already existing in effective schools. These schools were deemed "effective" because average standardized scores on student achievement tests ranged from 1.6 to 2.1 levels over national norms. Programs in the arts and daily physical education activities were common.

Resources in these schools were adequate. Parents and citizens were satisfied with these schools.

The choice of a district and schools to be investigated in the final stage of research was more complicated. We wished to find a group of schools in the process of school improvement, directed by the school district but with authority for implementation decisions delegated to the schools. The district must have a research and evaluation department and good longitudinal data. The final requirement, that extra resources assigned to the school improvement project be kept to a minimum, was crucial. The investigator wished to see what configurations developed in schools where school improvement was a function of using what was already there in terms of resources. Extra resources for all schools in the United States wanting to improve was not a political reality in 1984. It was also hypothesized that extra resources might cause goal displacement in schools; that is, schools wanting more money for programs might use added resources on present programs, without changing the school culture, climate or procedures.

The definition of school "effectiveness" was especially troublesome. How could schools be classified as "effective" which were only in the middle of school improvement programs? At this juncture the investigator remembered something from the Effective Schools literature that would be of help. Ronald Edmonds had insisted that to him an effective school was one that "eliminates the relationship between successful performance and family background" of the student. He had used this summary definition of school effectiveness in his project, "Search for Effective Schools."

While this choice of definition remains controversial, and Edmonds himself says it was politically motivated as well as theoretically motivated, it serves the purpose of exploratory research.

The logic is simple. If, in schools which "eliminate the relationship between successful performance and family background," there is a configuration of beliefs and organizational structures, a culture, a climate which promotes learning in all children, then this configuration should be studied. The goal of educating all of the children cannot be considered unimportant in a democratic society, and so this particular criterion of effectiveness can be accepted by many constituencies in our pluralistic society; it is not an arbitrary choice. Schools investigated in the final stage of research would meet this criterion, based upon school-by-school outcomes on standardized student achievement tests.

To measure which schools were effective under this definition, student scores on standardized achievement tests in reading and mathematics would be "disaggregated," according to socio-economic status of the child. The SES would be measured by two measures: if the child were part of the free lunch program, and/or if the child's mother were not a high school graduate, then that child would be placed in the "low-socio-economic" or "low income" category (depending upon how the school district measured these classifications.)

In order for a school to be defined as "effective," the normal distribution curves of low income children would be very similar or equal to the distribution curves of middle income children at that school. Furthermore, the schools would still be improving, even if some components

of the improvement program had begun to plateau. All levels of the school would be improving, if not every year, at least every other year. An upward trend would be unmistakable across all classrooms.

Principals of these schools deemed effective would themselves be defined as effective principals, or effective change * principals, as long as they had been participants as principals in the improvement program for more than four years. Four years is sufficient time to bring students to the base line norm of effectiveness as defined above; four years is also enough time for slippage to occur under the direction of a more typical principal. All of the schools and principals in the sample met these standards.

* These terms are used interchangeably in this paper. Effective principal means effective change principal. To ease the flow of words the terms are used alternately.

Methodology: Research Procedure

Twenty-two principals from five school districts were interviewed and shadowed by the investigator, who spent a day at each school. Arriving at school before the principal did, the investigator observed the arrival of students, teachers, and staff. Each visit was unique in the investigative procedure, because each school was assumed to be unique. During the final research stage, however, certain common research instruments were used at each school (eight in all) of the sample. These instruments were:

- Classroom observation check list
- Shadowing check list
- Structured interview with open-ended questions
- The principal's role instrument

All interviews were taped and the tapes transcribed by the investigator. The interviews were one and one-half to two hours in length, and served as a check to see if the frames the investigator sketched during the shadowing of the principal were close in configuration to the ones the principal actually used as he or she recounted the reasons for decisions made, actions taken that day, or months or even years before.

Using data collection and interpretation procedures specified by Glaser and Strauss in constant comparison analysis (1967) and by Holsti in content analysis (1969), the language of the principals was transformed as indicators into theoretical categories and properties. Extensive coding was used to make systematic the comparisons.

These interpretive processes produced a discernible pattern in the principal's strategic thinking during school improvement activities. By focusing on certain events in the daily life of the school and giving

them special interpretation, the principal motivates staff and students, and achieves the organizational momentum necessary to carry out improvement programs.

The discernible pattern became evident to the investigator as she formed a laundry list of the improvement program's benchmarks, as recalled by the sample principals during interviews and shadowing activities. The research indicators, the language of the principals, were grouped into many school activity categories and finally collapsed into four major groups. These groups became the theoretical categories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) from which the theory evolved. The four groups contain all the significant strategic thinking of the principals. These groups are the four primary managerial relationships the sample principals use in their work. They bound their strategic thinking with these four frames.

As these theoretical categories were being discovered, the investigator noticed a difference in the strategic thinking of two of the principals in the final phase of research. Rather than address strategic issues on idiographic, formal or structural, and external levels of the organization, these principals seemed to be concerned about only one level. Further content analysis led to classify these two principals as more typical types. (see page 15-16, section on "Discoveries"). When school-by-school test results were released by the district, indeed these two schools had made less progress, and had "plateaued" in some areas of improvement, compared with others in the sample. The investigator knew at that point that the methods of generating grounded theory were turning up interesting relationships. Even a small sample had led to saturation of the conceptual categories.

In generating grounded theory, a representative sample is not as important as it is in testing a theory. Glaser and Strauss tell us that it is more important that the theory be built on a foundation that is appropriate to the terms or language in which it is expressed. It is more important to saturate the theoretical categories with rich description of the elements involved and to propose their relationships where they are evident.

The research process itself evolves through the inductive method of reasoning during the generation of grounded theory. The primary data base must come from empirical research, field work, and observable events or interviews. Each discovery can lead to another path of inquiry. The researcher is not bound to a predetermined path, as she is with deductive forms of inquiry.

Of course, inferences must be plausible, and the context of a finding alters its meaning. These demands led the investigator to do all of the data collection, interpretation and manipulation herself. While this procedure may have biased the results of the study, it insured that the core of the emerging theory remained open to suggestion and subsequent alteration when and where it seemed necessary.

For instance, the emergence of the research unit of analysis in this study is a good example of how the core of the theory changed.

At first it seemed that the process of strategic issue resolution would be the unit of analysis: What were the identifiable strategic issues? How did the principal respond to these issues? With whom did he or she interact and what were the observable results? Jane Dutton had traced what she termed the strategic issue resolution process

(SIR process) in her 1983 study of nine such processes in an industrial organization. (see page 21 , section on "Discoveries"). Using Dutton's model the investigator realized during the last four visits to schools during the final research phase, that the unit of analysis should be a single episode of the process, which she named a unit of "strategic dialogue."

The inductive reasoning which elected to use the unit of strategic dialogue as the unit of analysis went something like this: Unlike most large industrial concerns an elementary school is a very flat organization, with hierarchies according to clusters (horizontal) rather than height (vertical), as James Thompson described hierarchies typical of organizations containing interdependent groups with high needs for coordination and conflict resolution. (1967) In this sense the school leader, the principal, is a source of much of the coordination and control mechanism. There is not a long line of command present to interfere with the influence the principal could exert. The effective principal is aware of this aspect of discretionary decision-making accorded him, and taking advantage of this "loose-coupling" uses individual communication episodes to promote conditions which help to further school improvement.

We have here a largely uncontaminated source of motivation, of organization momentum, to study. By listening to the principal's language, we could map out a cognitive ethnography of the principal's mind. By observing these individual communication episodes, and then asking the principal later what it was he or she wished to accomplish in each episode,

we could name the frames and factors the principal used to strategically define the dialogue. Could it be that these frames and factors were the links between the behavior of the principal and those "factors he or she intended to influence or actually did influence" during school improvement programs?

The process of generating grounded theory once again allowed the investigator to see what needed to be seen. If there were common patterns of strategic thought among this sample of diverse principals (their only common trait was that they were deemed successful and effective), then we could infer that there was indeed a common knowledge base being used to bring about the improvement of schools. This knowledge base, whether it stemmed from pragmatic sources or more academic ones, if it were known, could be of use in teaching other principals how to bring good schools into being.

Discoveries: The Primary Skills and Knowledge of the Successful Principal

> I knew there were two troubled schools that I might be sent to. So when I came here I felt they sent me to do a job. I'm getting paid to do it, and I'll do it my way. I don't believe in a whole lot of participatory decision-making initially. I think that comes after you set the tone and put the basic structure in place where change can take place for the better. Someone has to be the designer, the architect, to come up with that design that's going to make things workable.

The quotation above, from one particularly aware principal in the sample, states the fundamental belief of an overwhelming majority of the twenty-two principals interviewed: that designing and developing an organizational capacity for change in their schools is a primary and instrumental activity of all elementary public school principals worth their salt. What distinguishes between the more typical administrator-principal and the "effective change" principal is the number of levels of organization upon which the particular principal sees change taking place, and the management posture he or she adopts.

Effective change principals see change in terms of all three levels of the organization: idiographic or individual, formal or structural, and external or environmental.[19] They are proactive in their management posture; that is, effective change principals see and plan ahead, set objectives, all the while predicting contingencies with regard to organizational actions and subsequent responses which will be made by the school's constituencies. They are comprehensive in their approach

and cognizant of the expectations each of their constituencies have of them. There is some felt conflict as they play out the many roles of the principalship. There is relatively little role ambiguity, because of the working consensus of expectations developed between them, their staffs, the students, and their parents.

The typical administrator-principal, on the other hand, "had no clear process for goal setting and as a result lacked precise goals. Planning is likely to occur only in rather abstract terms for the typical principal, every problem becomes important and little time is left to become involved in teacher's classroom curriculum planning." The typical principal is reactive to district demands and many other demands a principal encounters everyday.[20] This type of principal is termed a Responder, or a Figurehead.[21] He or she handles routing matters inefficiently and thereby, by design or lack of training in management procedures, has little time left for staff supervision and instructional leadership.

The principal who is "disorganized" and has no time for curricular development or instructional leadership, given sufficient basic resources and district support, is communicating something about his or her values and priorities as well as previous experience and training. The effective principal knows this and knows how important it is to establish priorities early. An effective change principal whose school was well along in the improvement process offered this insight when asked by the investigator, "What did you do first? How did you set your priorities?"

> First I looked at the staff, and dealt with them. I got into the classrooms more often....tried to see where they were in terms of unit groupings and levels. But then I realized that wasn't the place to start, so I left classes alone... as they were for the first year... and looked at the needs of the building, to see how it was running, what made it tick. It was then I made it known to the staff there were going to be changes. I related to them the test scores and where we were ... and that one of our major goals was to eliminate discipline problems and make instruction our number one goal.
>
> You see, I realized the building was being run for the teachers. But the needs of kids come first...we will meet their needs before anyone else...a concern for all the students. I showed them I was going to be fair, and I had to demonstrate this, and my competence, and I had to take control. By the end of the second year, I was really asserting myself. A lot of the staff attitudes were changing, but I still had the union to deal with. I took a teacher down to the wire and she was transferred. They knew then that the school was being run for kids.

Effective change principals are very much aware of the symbolism of even the most mundane of their administrative acts. The best principals take ordinary occasions to demonstrate their beliefs, and do so with dramatic emphasis, if that is appropriate to their personalities. How the principal carries out administrative duties during the very early stages of school improvement indicates his or her most basic cultural beliefs. From the first school day the actions of the principal are a testament to beliefs about schooling, and he or she is observed and tested accordingly. The effective change principal intuitively knows that it is the unique configuration of tasks which are actually accomplished that indicates to the school personnel, students and teachers and support staff alike, the seriousness of the principal's commitment

to and competency to reach the improvement goals of the school.

While most principals, effective change or typical, relegate their administrative tasks to low status and seem to be unaware of their primacy in making operations efficient, it is the effective change principal who actually does perform and delegate these functions efficiently in order to get on to the tasks he or she considers important to school improvement: curriculum development, evaluation activities, and staff development.

The daily accomplishment of administrative tasks is the bedrock upon which all other basic and secondary operations of the school rest. The effective change principal then is one who participates in many actions which promote beneficial and lasting change, having as a top priority the organization of the workday so that time is available to plan for change, to interact with staff, students, and parents regarding change issues and strategies, and to implement new procedures and processes.

Discoveries: The Principal's Meta-sensemaking: Interaction with Staff, Parents and Students

Remember the many times you have tried to explain an idea you have had to someone else? Having attempted to anticipate that person's frame of reference, value structure, and relevant knowledge with regard to your idea, you do your best to put the elements of the idea in

language the other person understands, and then you sum up your presentation and ask, "Does that make sense to you?" You hear what your colleague, student, or spouse has to say, and then you respond to his or her own ideas, questions and concerns regarding the initial topic. This verbal give and take is analagous to weaving a whole cloth: as the shuttle passes from one side to the other, depending upon the action of the loom (controlled by the pedals), a certain pattern emerges, and is recognized by the weavers. This process is sensemaking, and although it can be carried out between group and individual, group and group, and individual and individual, the most efficient arrangement is the dyad. [22] Sensemaking is the process of creating an interactive fabric of thought with other persons. The design may be different from one encounter to another, but the fabric gets woven as an understandable communication episode.

Sensemaking is carried on continuously by people, inside and outside organizations. We are interested in the sensemaking which occurs within organizations, especially schools. Each member of the school organization engages in this process many times everyday.

> Ultimately, as individuals work together, they must arrive at some mutually acceptable consensus about the meaning of the organization: they must arrive at a group cause map. The sensemaking processes engaged in by individuals, by groups of individuals, and by groups of groups are continuous and constantly changing as their experience of the organization changes.
>
> Developing a group sense of the organization requires negotiation. It demands a meeting of the minds and a willingness to reconsider one's own cause maps in the light of others', and in the context of new situations.

> This process may result in slight alternations or major shifts in understandings of the organization, yielding new cause maps all around. These collaborative understandings constitute the negotiated order, the currently agreed-upon sense of the organization, which is constantly emerging. These emerging understandings, in turn, act on participants, affecting their experience of the organization and hence their future sensemaking.[23]

Enactment is the first stage of sensemaking. "Enactment is that process by which the environment is created for the organization. This created environment is what decision-makers then react to in formulating and revising the strategy and design of the organization and in evaluating the organization's performance."[24] After enactment occurs, in one person's mind or in three or nine, about what constitutes "our situation here," the dyad or group can then set about sensemaking between one another.

Principals, effective and less effective alike, spend a large portion of their time in dialogue with individuals and groups at the school site. Whether accomplishing daily tasks or moving the school along toward improvement goals, or juggling both objectives simultaneously, the principal participates in these communication episodes, and uses them as his or her primary vehicle to accomplish strategic objectives.

We call these communication episodes "units of strategic dialogue," and these were our units of analysis. Most of the discoveries attributed to this research were elements of the unit of strategic dialogue: the frames with which the principal bounded the dialogue; the verbal give and take and the emphasis the principal gave these dialogues during the successive phases of change in the school: the knowledge base

upon which the strategy was based; the "knowledge-in-action"[25] used by effective change principals. Focussing on both process and content of the units of strategic dialogue, this research found, as did Jane Dutton, that, "the processing of strategic issues has several different meanings in the organization. The strategic issue resolution process was found to be a performance program, control process, channel for learning, ventilator for participants, agenda setting process and attention organizing process. Each of these meanings highlighted a different but significant dimension of the process."[26]

In a word the process, used by principals, teachers, students, and the district office, in cooperation with parents and the community, to move the school along the improvement path can be termed "meta-sensemaking."[27] Meta-sensemaking denotes the comprehensive character of the process, devised along all levels of the organization (idiographic, formal-structural, and environmental), cognizant of the shifting actions of any or all of these levels, and finally aware of the patterns that emerge in weaving the whole cloth. The process is iterative and dynamic, and so must receive impetus from a person or group to move it along. The process cries for a designer to give it thrust and focus by coordinating and controlling the emerging pattern, to make certain what is being done is what the school wants to produce as its product. This is where the principal can play a crucial role in school improvement, and where the effective principal stations himself or herself. The principal is not only a designer and developer of an organization which has a capacity for change, he or she is also the orchestrator of meta-sensemaking at the school site.

Discoveries: Four Primary Frames Used by Principals in their Strategic Dialogues with Individuals and Groups at the School Site

The effective principal orchestrates change and the development of the school's capacity to make change just as the Jazz musician plays off of his fellow musicians' interpretations of the score. Just as the musicians seem to know an inherent hierarchy exists in their midst, and the play of momentum passes from one musician to another, the people at the school site are cognizant of a working consensus of relationships which shifts from day to day. However, as the person through whom district policies are enforced, the principal must coordinate, control, and communicate what is happening as it is happening; the principal is the lead musician in effective schools. The principal involves and is involved with the ideas and plans of building staff, the district office, parents and students through meta-sensemaking, and together all of these music-makers produce their own configuration of an effective school. What are originally very distinct, individual and dynamic contributions at their sources find their places atop a basic structure and blend with harmonious, congruent and consistent results.

This basic structure upon which the improvisation of the principals and their constituencies is based became evident through interviewing and observing the sample principals. The structure is made up of cognitive frames used by the principals to bound their actions, and these frames formed the most interesting theoretical categories of this

research. These cognitive frames are the basis of all the principal's strategic actions, and all the discoveries of this research proceeded from the realization of these frames.

To be able to coordinate, control and communicate effectively, the principal develops cognitive frames with which he or she bounds the units of strategic dialogue, or meta-sensemaking episodes. Without these frames, strategic dialogue and meta-sensemaking in an organization as dynamic as a school would become chaotic. The principals bound their strategic dialogues with cognitive frames which proceed from those managerial ties they deem most important to program success. Every effective change principal uses these frames intuitively, scarcely aware of the role these frames play, because of their ubiquitous nature. These cognitive frames contain both the processes and the vehicles for carrying out the tasks of change. In this way the cognitive frames are the strategic frames for change: by using day-to-day relationships, the principals build organizational momentum or readiness for change at the same time as they maintain the school activities. Without a readiness for change, organizations proceed at their peril to attempt new arrangements for doing things. With organizational readiness, change is possible and more probable.[28]

The frames contain the principal's logic-in-action and it is these links, which the principal intuitively and implicitly makes between his actions, organizational change, and classroom activities, which make this grounded theory so interesting. The links are delineated in the following discussion, where we describe briefly the interesting configurations of each cognitive frame.

The four primary cognitive frames used by sample principals are:

1) the use of a "criterion of effectiveness" to achieve school improvement focus, rationale and momentum;

2) the working relationship between principal-teachers-parents-students;

3) the setting of professional and school standards;

4) the establishment and enforcement of an equitable discipline code.

The criterion of effectiveness is that belief articulated by the principal, district, and staff as being primary in relating the rationale for school improvement to the implementation of change. In "Effective Schools", for instance, this criterion is articulated by the phrase, "All kids can learn," and from this criterion flow program implementation evaluation criteria, standards, and measures (usually standardized scores on student achievement tests) and the rationale for using these particular evaluation tools.

Other criteria of effectiveness used in the sample of schools visited for this research were:

> We will teach our kids to work independently from grade one, so they will learn to teach themselves.
>
> We teach our kids to learn by doing. Sure they learn the basic skills, but they also learn to apply these skills where and when they need to.

This criterion simply states the rationale for doing things the way they are being done. The criteria and standards used in judging academic performance, the structure of working relationships and behavioral codes, the evaluation criteria and standards used

for staff and administrative performance all proceed from this criterion of effectiveness.

If there is no stated criterion of effectiveness, then many criteria exist for evaluation of progress, some stated, some unstated, and little is accomplished. No working consensus has been established concerning "what we are about." Evaluation is always a political process in schools, but without clear criteria it becomes useless for program purposes.[29] This is why the Effective Schools correlates have been useful for practitioners who would improve their schools. The correlates have made explicit some of the components of criteria of effectiveness used by principals in improving their schools. The links made by the principals go something like this:

> If "all kids can learn," then we need leadership actions from the principal which symbolize this fact...actions which assure that high expectations for performance are met by students and staff....that a monitoring system, timely and accurate, is in place and consistently used...that the school is orderly and safe, a good place in which to learn...that there is recognition and reward for good performance....that there is an emphasis on academic subjects...and teacher efficacy.

One particularly articulate principal said:

> This school exists for children, to make sure they get a quality education, and a quality education for the child at this school means that a normal distribution of them should be above, at, and below level.... that's what ought to be happening... and it's our job to make sure it's happening. I'm not working you too hard, I'm not putting the pressure on you, my expectations are not unreasonable; that's what any reasonable person should expect in the job we've got to do. I'm going to educate you to the extent that you <u>know</u> that can happen.

> We have to unlearn some things that universities have taught us about testing, norm distributions and disadvantage... that you really can't expect too much from certain students because they're from a low socio-economic group and all that other crap....

The criterion of effectiveness is, then, the engine that drives change, that spark that lights the fire, that ignites excitement, that precludes continuing to do things that are new with old reasons. New things are attempted because the old order is known not to work. Education-as-usual is no longer good enough to survive the new evaluation criteria and standards. The people at the school site are off together on an adventure during which new things will be tried; a camaraderie begins to be felt among them.

The second strategic frame is the working relationship between principal, teachers, students and their parents. The ultimate purpose of the effective change principal's strategy is to strengthen his or her relationship with the classroom teacher, and through the teacher, strengthen the relationship with the students and their parents, so that the teaching-learning process can be influenced and modified as necessary to reach the student and improve performance. That working relationship is built on trust and respect so pervasive that the teacher involved will persist against all odds to work out new strategies, new approaches to teaching, new methodologies, new techniques, and add these to his or her repertoire of existing skills, and use all of these skills whenever needed to reach the reluctant student. The teacher knows through all this work that the principal will support his or her endeavors, as will the school organization, until the

teacher has exhausted all available approaches to reach the student and alter his or her "pupil pursuits". [30]

The important working relationship between principal and teacher is built upon structures which replace the older principal-teacher relationship. If a layering effect takes place in the acquisition of a new relationship, it will be too easy for the older relationship to reappear. The principal promotes a new relationship to replace the old by a symbolic act (or acts) which orders the new group of expectations and working rearrangements. This act (or acts) signifies the beginning of school improvement although the improvement process was envisioned in the mind of the principal before this event occurs. The event epitomizes the fact that the principal is promoting change and represents what he or she stands for, what she will tolerate and what she will not. The particulars of the new working relationship flow from these explicitly stated expectations on the part of the principal, to which the teacher responds over time. The nature of teacher responses charts the course of the improvement process, and the mutual expectations which develop comprise the give and take of the daily working relationship.

Implied in the development of a new working relationship, and found in all the case studies of the sample principals, was the ubiquitous element of a negotiation of prerogatives. Negotiation of prerogatives is a major part of the daily exercise of tight working relationships where there are mutual high expectations. These mutual high expectations often collide in the course of program

implementation, and a reasonable, speedy adjustment must be made to keep the program momentum and promote ownership in the change efforts. Through strategic dialogue and meta-sensemaking these daily negotiations take place within the principal-teacher-student-parent relationship.

The third strategic frame is one of the most difficult to work within: the setting of professional standards and school standards. If our schools are to be responsive to our pluralistic society, they must respond to many cultures, many philosophies of education. It is in the realm of setting standards that educators, parents, citizens, and students disagree most. What should be taught, when, and with what performance level as a standard? All of these questions are closely related. All of these questions are core curriculum development concerns.

Intuitively the sample principals knew that the setting of standards is a strategically important area. They knew that the development of curriculum and of staff is predicated on the accomplishment of agreed-upon professional and school standards. They knew a working consensus on standards must be forced in order to make consistent the educational program, the cornerstone of equal education opportunity. They knew they would be evaluated by the district office in part on how well their school raised student achievement scores, a standard reflected in all the sample districts' policies. While the question of what shall be taught and to what standard is usually a state and local school board decision, the implementation of local and state directives is the responsibility of the building staff and the principal.

The sample principals took these directives as a given, orders to be followed, and used this clout to influence program and curriculum development. A particularly able principal explained how he connected standards and program:

> I don't know if its important at the beginning of a school improvement program whether you're talking about sixty or seventy percent of your kids testing out at the fiftieth percentile or over. Setting standards for improvement is not as important as an attitudinal thing. A teacher will say, "The kids can learn if I teach them, and if I do what I'm supposed to be doing, and I put in the energy and time and I have techniques and I have knowledge to do these things, I can change things." That's what I'm talking about, an attitudinal change which will allow teachers to work systematically and attitudinally towards continuous improvement in academic areas.
>
> I don't know what sixty or seventy percent means... it means that teachers have worked in a more systematic way, have refined their techniques, have gained greater understanding of their curriculum and its possibilities, have changed their attitudes to the extent where more and more kids are doing well. I guess that's what improvement in the scores means.

This principal's school had progressed more than any other in the school improvement program investigated in the final research stage, and the school was exemplary. Although eighty-five percent of the children attending the school were from the lowest income classes, eighty percent of the children were scoring in the seventieth percentile rank or higher on standardized achievement tests. And the school was still improving.

This principal was telling us that setting and maintaining standards are very political processes, and principals are very smart to filter out many of the potentially disruptive elements

that go along with the implementing of standards. Using district academic standards as the guideline for specifying professional and school standards at the school site, the principal works pragmatically with staff and students to accomplish tasks according to these standards. Most of the sample principals intuitively used this strategic frame to exert pressure for curricular change and staff development, to negotiate with district staff as well as building staff how fast progress in school improvement would be carried out, and in what direction, according to the school culture and climate. The principal above describes standards in cultural terms, "an attitudinal thing," so that he or she can enhance the culture for change and climate for learning. The principal thus sees school improvement in terms of a systemic point of view and plans accordingly, allowing time for change to take place which will then aid efforts to accomplish more change.

The fourth strategic frame, the establishment and enforcement of an equitable discipline code, reflects the extent to which the professional and school standards have been satisfactorally set. If the discipline code is really equitable, then how well the discipline code is working is an indication of how well the standards have been set. The more accurate the level of the standards, the more efficacious the discipline code if it is equitable.

There has been little research done to test this hypothesis; yet the sample principals used this homily as a rule of thumb. If

they have too many students from one classroom sent to their offices, they review the situation with the teacher involved, and check the pace of teaching, methodologies involved, level of instruction, sequencing of subjects, all of those things research has found to influence classroom effectiveness. This is especially true with new and young teachers. The teacher may have to sacrifice standards in pacing for awhile, until she brings all the children up to pace by altering her teaching methods or classroom management techniques.

If the lunchroom is out of control and the cafeteria workers complain, or children are being hurt from classmates' antics while they are standing in line, then the principal will have to make himself or herself more visible, make a few examples of the rowdiest students, even figure out a better lunchtime procedure. The professional standard of "no lunchtime duty for classroom teachers" may have to be altered to "extra pay for those teachers who have chosen lunchtime duty."

By consistent enforcement of the discipline code, the principal can show he or she means what he or she says. By being fair and just, the principal can use the discipline code to build self-discipline in the students, through working with the teachers and parents to implement to code.

Summary

There is a knowledge-in-action which effective change principals use both intuitively and thoughtfully to move their schools along during school improvement programs. These principals have, through on-the-job training as they manage their school, conducted a type of action research to learn what strategies work best. Through implicit trial and error and through more systematic experiments, they have learned how to improve their schools.

Through the generation of grounded theory, a research design which preserves the rich complexity of the theoretical categories studied, the investigator analyzed the language and the actions of effective change principals, to delineate the links they make between designing a school which has the capacity to change, a culture and climate that promotes confidence and learning on the part of the student, and desire on the part of the teacher to attempt new procedures which teach and develop children from all walks of life. The principal says, "My job is to make it all come together, and working with the teachers is the most important part of that job." To change what happens in the classroom, you must do many things.

Through the process of sensemaking, and by using specific strategic frames to bound his other decision-making, the principal interacts with staff, students and parents to create momentum for change. By addressing specific barriers to school improvement the principal and his or her staff make change possible and even probable.

The tools and tasks which link the principal's strategies to classroom activities are long-linked and iterative: The process begins with demonstration of "what works" before trial acceptance of what works, and trial acceptance of what works before understanding of what works. Understanding of what works then leads to belief of what works and attempts to use what works. The use of what works is largely experimental until it is skillfully done, and done efficaciously. Only then does "what works" become part of the practitioner's art; these practices are then added to his or her repertoire of skills and to demonstrated artistry-in-action.

The practitioners in the field are ahead of educational researchers in discovering these workable arrangements. The researchers can learn from the practitioners, and at the same time delineate what is happening in good school improvement programs for the mutual benefit of practitioners and the research community. Because the practitioners' knowledge is largely intuitive, the frames, factors, and elements they address need to be defined in a systematic way and laid before them, so that those less successful practitioners can profit from their colleagues' discoveries. Ultimately the knowledge the effective change principal owns must be placed in the curriculum for educational administration, taught at schools of education and in extension courses and inservice training.

The research community has a great deal to gain from this collaborative activity. By focussing on very specific relationships, educational researchers will be able to describe the links and even explain their effects. The manner in which less effective schools become effective will then be known.

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